VII
FIVE DESTINATIONS (*PANCAGATI*)

CONTENTS

What are the Five Destinations?

In the *Mahasihananda Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya Sutta* 130, the Buddha mentioned five destinations (*pancagati*) for rebirth. What are the five? **Hell**, the **animal** realm, the realm of **ghosts, human beings** and **gods**. Hell, animal and ghost realms are woeful states of existence (*duggati*) while the realms of humans and gods are happy states of existence (*sugati*). Here "gods" include the **sensuous gods** (*devas*), the non-sensuous gods of the **form plane** (*rupa brahmas*), and the non-sensuous gods of the **formless plane** (*arupa brahmas*).

Hell or *niraya* is believed to exist below the earth's surface. For example, the ***Lohakumbhi* (Iron Cauldron)** hell of hot molten metal mentioned in the *Dhammapada* Commentary**,** where the four rich lads had to suffer for committing adultery, is said to be situated below the earth's crust. The animal, ghost, and human realms exist on the surface of the earth. These realms are not separate, but the beings move about in their own worlds. The gods are believed to live above the earth and high up in the sky in celestial mansions that travel swiftly through the sky (*Vimanavatthu* or Mansion Stories).

1. Hell (*Niraya*)

In Buddhism, beings are born in hell due to their accumulation of weighty bad *kamma*. There they undergo unlimited suffering that is hard to endure and dreadful, terrible and heart-rending. The Buddha said that the suffering of one stabbed incessantly by three hundred spears compared to the suffering in hell is like a small stone compared to the Himalayas. However, the hell beings do not suffer eternally unlike what is taught in other religions. Upon the exhaustion of their evil *kamma,* beings may be reborn in good states as a result of their past good *kamma*. According to the Commentaries, there are **eight major hells**, namely:

a) **Eight Major Hells**

i) ***Sanjiva*** where beings are cut into pieces and killed for many thousands of years and they revive there again and again to undergo this torture. Hence the name ***Sanjiva,*** the **Revival Hell.**

ii) ***Kalasutta*** where they are split like wood with burning saws along a mark made by a black thread. Hence the name ***Kalasutta*** the **Black Thread Hell.**

iii) ***Sanghata*** where they are crushed to death over and over again by iron rollers. Hence the name ***Sanghata,*** the **Crushing Hell.**

iv) ***Roruva*** where there is terrible screaming by beings constantly consumed by flames and smoke entering their bodies through the nine orifices. Hence the name ***Roruva*****,** the **Screaming Hell**.

v) ***Maharoruva*** where the screams are greater because of the awfulness of the fire torture by being baked in a huge mass of fire. Hence the name *Maharo**ruva,*** the **Great Screaming Hell.**

vi) ***Tapana*** where beings are pierced with giant red hot skewers and roasted over a fire, firmly held and unable to move. Hence the name *Tapana***,** the **Roasting Hell.**

vii) ***Mahatapana*** where beings are forced by fiery weapons to climb up a burning mountain until they fall down only to be strung up again on fiery iron bars, firmly held and unable to move while being roasted. Hence the name ***Mahatapana,*** the **Extreme Roasting Hell.**

viii) ***Avici*** the lowest and greatest hell, a hundred *yojanas* (one yojana is about 8 miles) square encircled by an iron wall with iron roof above and incandescent floor of glowing iron. Here, beings are attacked by blazing fires that rush incessantly from one side and strike at the opposite side. The heat is so terrible that it is said that even the bones melt there. Since there is no intermission of suffering here, it is called ***Avici,*** the **Hell without Intermission.**

b) **Minor Hells**

Each great hell is surrounded on each of its four sides by five minor hells bringing the total number of hells to **8 + 8 × 4 × 5 = 168**. The terrible sufferings of beings in these minor hells are described in the ***Devaduta Sutta*** of the ***Majjhima Nikaya*.** Yet in all cases, the beings do not die but undergo the torture repeatedly so long as the evil ***kamma*** has not yet exhausted its results. The minor hells are:

i) ***Milhakupa* or excrement pit hell**, where beings are pierced by a horrible horde of worms.

ii) ***Kukkula* or hot embers hell**, where beings are cooked like mustard seeds.

iii) **Forest of Simbali Trees** bristling with long, sharp, burning, blazing thorns which pierce and tear the flesh of beings who are forced to climb up and down those trees.

iv) **Forest of Sword-leaf Trees** whose razor-sharp leaves, stirred by the wind, cut off the hands and feet, ears and noses of beings who enter it.

v) **Terrible river *Vetarani*** whose running water is caustic. Beings fall into it and are swept upstream and downstream constantly being attacked by the caustic water. Next the being is pulled out with hooks and his mouth prised opened with red-hot tongs. He is fed with a red-hot iron ball that burns his lips, mouth, throat, stomach and it passes out below carrying with it his large and small intestines. To quench his thirst, molten copper is poured into his mouth that burns his lips, mouth, throat, stomach and it passes out below carrying with it his large and small intestines.

2. Animals (*Tiracchana*)

Tiracchana means **'going horizontally'** and aptly describes the animal mode of movement. Birth in the animal plane is full of **suffering, violence and great fear.** Born in the wild, smaller animals live in constant fear of being **eaten up** by larger animals that in turn are constantly being harassed or **hunted to extinction** by humans for sport or commercial purposes. They suffer from heat and cold, flood and drought, and there is no one to tend to them when they are sick and wounded. Domesticated animals fare no better. Most are **bred and killed** for their meat, fur, horns, bones, skin and so on. In less developed countries, they become **beasts of burden**, bound by many ropes, yoked to carriage-shaft, plough or cart, shoulders bruised, beaten with whips and sticks, some carrying crushing loads. Household pets would appear to have a relatively better life only if they have kind and understanding owners otherwise they would have to scavenge the streets for food and face the danger of being killed or injured by fast moving vehicles. Life is **truly suffering** for these dumb creatures.

3. Ghosts (*Peta*)

Petas are ghostly beings absolutely **devoid of happiness**. They live a life of misery, being subjected to incessant pain and suffering, lack of food and clothing, much like human dregs living in abject poverty. Thus they restlessly search for food here and there, hence the name *peta* – **those gone on and on**. In appearance they are generally described as **extremely emaciated** and have large heads with eyes and cheeks sunken, their faces darkened by long disheveled hair. Their bodies have only skin, bones and tendons remaining, skeletons visible and rib-spaces sunken. But this is not always the case. Descriptions of *petas* and *petis* (female ghosts) in the *Samyutta* and *Petavatthu* show that they come in **various shapes and sizes** depending on their past unwholesome *kamma*. In fact, the sightings of *petas* narrated in *Samyutta* took place in broad daylight!

In the ***Samyutta Nidana Vagga***, Kindred Sayings on Lakkhana's Questions, the descriptions of various *petas,* which Ven. Maha Moggallana saw clairvoyantly ranged from a skeleton to a lump of flesh going through the air chased by vultures, crows and falcons pecking at them; or a man or woman bristling with sword-blades, arrows or spears that kept falling and piercing their bodies causing them to scream in pain as they go through the air. In the *Petavatthu*, the appearances of the *petas* and *petis* are also highly variable: one had a beautiful complexion but had worms in his putrid smelling mouth, another was ox-faced, another was red-eyed with fangs while others were emaciated with protruding veins and ribs, or with a body the size of a tree trunk and tongue sticking out of his parched throat. There was even a *peti* who lived in a mansion enjoying celestial comfort by day and suffering at night – being devoured by a black dog, which cast her bones into a lotus pond and she regained her life each time as a result of *kamma*.

These vivid descriptions evidently highlight the extreme suffering experienced by *Petas* as a result of their unwholesome *kamma*. According to *Milinda-Panha,* there are **four classes** of *Petas:*

a) ***Vantasikas*** who feed on what have been **vomited** by others.

b) ***Khuppipasinos*** who suffer from being continually tormented by **extreme hunger and thirst** for very long periods of time.

c) ***Nijjhamatanhikas*** who are consumed by thirst, being tormented by a **continual burning feeling** within their bodies.

d) ***Paradattupa-jivi*** who depend on what others offer for them. They remember their living relatives and see what they do. Only this class of *Petas* can receive and **share in the merits** when offerings are made on their behalf (see **Transference of Merits** to Departed Relatives in Chapter XII.12).

Notes on *Asuras* (Titans)

According to *Kathavatthu* – Points of Controversy Book VIII, the ***Kalakanja asuras*** resemble the *Petas* in ugly and frightful shape,

sex-life, diet, lifespan, and intermarry with them. It is said that their bodies resemble dried leaves with scarcely any flesh and blood and cover a space of **three *gavutas*** (see explanation below). Their eyeballs jut out from their heads like crabs. Their mouths are as small as a needle's eye and are situated on top of their heads so that they have to bend their heads downward whenever they want to eat or drink. Being **consumed by anger,** these demons or angry ghosts like to **attack one another** with burning weapons of their own *kammic* productions and are thus tormented, such torment being the resultants of their past evil actions. These *asuras* of the woeful plane belong to a class of *Petas* who are more powerful but are unhappy beings. They are different from the ***asuras devas*** led by King Vepacitti who originally inhabited *Tavatimsa* heaven but were defeated by Sakka, king of *devas* and driven to another part of the heavens. Vepacitti's *asuras* are a **class of *devas*** and intermarry with *devas*. In later Buddhist tradition, the *asuras* or titans were added as a separate unhappy realm to give **four woeful states.**

***Gavuta*:** In early Vedic times, a *gavuta* was about 6 feet. Nowadays it is reckoned as ¼ of a *yojana*, a *yojana* being about 8 miles.

4. Human Realm (*Manussa*)

While the woeful realms and heavenly realms are dominated by suffering and bliss respectively, the **human world** is a mixture of both suffering and happiness. Thus a person is born either rich or poor, good looking or ugly, powerful or weak, wise or stupid, etc. according to his or her own good or bad past actions (supportive or obstructive *kamma*). However, to be born as a human being, the reproductive *kamma* that conditions the rebirth consciousness (*patisandhi*) must be wholesome with **two or three good roots** (Please refer to Chapter XI). People do not realize how difficult it is to be born as a human. By looking at the present human population, they think that there are many human beings on earth. By looking at the vastness of the heavens, they think that there are many inhabitants in the *deva* worlds. However, if they observe the animal

realm closely, they will realize that just the numbers of insects in a forest alone far exceed the human population. As for the *deva* worlds, it is said that although they are very extensive, the inhabitants are few.

From the discourse about the **blind turtle and the yoke** (*Samyutta* v, 455), one should appreciate how difficult and rare it is to be born as a human being. Birth as a human is one of the **five best opportunities** that are difficult to obtain (*dullabho*), the other four being**: encountering a Buddha**; ordaining as a ***bhikkhu***; attaining **confidence** in the Triple Gem; and **hearing the True *Dhamma*** (Doctrine). These five opportunities are important because it is through them that release from suffering can be obtained. Birth as a human being is important first of all because it means that one has escaped from the woeful states which involve great suffering. But it does not mean that ordinary happiness is the reason why human existence is so fortunate. If this were so, the Buddha would have included the *deva* and *brahma* states where the celestial pleasures far surpass anything on earth. Human existence is mentioned because it is the best state in which one can perform meritorious actions. This is not possible in the lower worlds because their inhabitants do not possess any good roots or they are in such pain that they cannot think of anything else. In the heavens, there is so much pleasure to enjoy that their inhabitants find it difficult to appreciate the Truth of Suffering. Moreover, their lifespans are so long that it is difficult for them to understand impermanence (*anicca*).

Bodhisattas prefer the human realm because they have the opportunity to develop the **Requisites of Buddhahood** (*paramis*) to the highest level. They are always born as human beings in their last birth where they attain Supreme Enlightenment and become Buddhas. We are most fortunate to be human beings now because although the Buddha has passed into *Parinibbana,* the Buddha *Sasana* is still available whereby we can hear the True *Dhamma* and attain confidence (*saddha*) even as lay folk. For those who become *bhikkhus*, they have obtained all the five best opportunities that are hard to come by.

5. World of Gods (*Devas & Brahmas*)

The gods of the **sensuous** plane are called ***Devas*** while the gods of the higher **non-sensuous planes** are called ***Brahmas.*** There are two types of Brahma gods, namely: those who possess **form (*rupa*)** and those who are **formless (*arupa*).**

A) The Six Sensuous Heavens (*Devaloka*)

There are six *deva* realms and they are situated above the earth. Except for the first two lower heavens, the rest are too far away to have any close connection with the earth.

i) ***Catumaharajika* (Four Great Kings):** This is the lowest of the heavenly realms where the four Guardian Deities reside with their followers. These Four Great Kings protect the four quarters of the world and are: (1) **Dhatarattha**, king of the East, sovereign lord of *Ghandhabbas* (heavenly musicians), (2) **Virulha,** king of the South where the *Petas* reside, sovereign lord of *Kumbhanas* (deformed *asuras*), (3) **Virupakkha,** king of the West, sovereign lord of the *Nagas* (serpents), and (4) **Kuvera** also called Vessavana, king of the North and sovereign lord of the *Yakkhas* (ogres or genie).

ii) ***Tavatimsa* (Heaven of Thirty-Three):** This is the next higher heaven where Sakka, king of gods reside. The original residents were the *Asura devas* but they were driven away by 33 new *devas* led by Sakka who did not want to share the kingdom with the *Asuras* who were addicted to drinking. Hence the name Tavatimsa.

iii) ***Yama* (Heaven of *Yama* Gods):** This is a realm of great happiness presided by the divine king Suyama or Yama. The *Yama* gods are different from the *Yama Rajah* of Hell who is a *Vemanika-Peta*, a *deva* for half a month and a *peta* the other half-month.

iv) ***Tusita*** **(Heaven of Delight):** This is the heaven where the *Bodhisatta Mettaya* is believed to be dwelling, waiting for the opportune time to be reborn as a human being and become the next Buddha.

v) ***Nimmarati*** **(Gods who enjoy their own creations):** This is the realm of *Devas* who have the power to create objects of sensual pleasure at will according to their desires.

vi) ***Paranimmita-vasavati*** **(Gods who control the creation of others):** The highest of the six sensuous heavens is ***Paranimmita-vasavati***, the realm of gods who bring under their sway things created by others. Incidentally, the god ***Mara*,** well known for opposing the Buddha and *Arahants*, lives in this realm. However, the ruler of this realm is a righteous king – the ***Vasavati Deva***. *Mara* and his retinue reside in a separate corner of the realm like a rebel leader.

B) The Sixteen Form Realms (*Rupa Brahma*)

i) **Three Planes of the First *Jhana:*** The lowest is called ***Brahma-parisajja*** or Brahma's retinue and the second is called ***Brahma-purohita*** or Brahma's ministers. The highest of these three planes is ***Maha-Brahma*** or Great *Brahmas.* They are so called because they exceed others in happiness, beauty and lifespan on account of their superior mental development. Those who develop the first *Jhana* to a normal extent are born in the first plane; those who have develop to a medium degree are born in the second plane; while those who have perfect control of the first *Jhana* are born as *Maha-brahmas*. The three divisions of the other *Jhanic* planes should be similarly understood.

ii) **Three Planes of the Second *Jhana:*** In order of mastery of the second *Jhana*, the *brahmas* of the second *Jhanic* planes are: ***Parittabha***, the gods of minor lustre; ***Appamanabha***, the gods of infinite lustre; and ***Abhassara**,* the gods of radiant lustre.

iii) **The Planes of the Third *Jhana*:** In order of mastery of the third *Jhana*, the *brahmas* of the third *Jhanic* planes are: ***Paritta-subha***, the gods of minor aura; ***Appamana-subha***, the gods of infinite aura; and ***Subha-kinha***, the gods of steady aura.

iv) **Seven Planes of the Fourth** *Jhana*: The planes of the fourth *Jhana* are ***Vehapphala***, the gods of great reward; ***Asanna-satta***, the unconscious beings; and the five planes of ***Suddhavasa***, the pure abodes where ***Anagamins* or Non-Returners** are reborn. Here again, depending on the predominant faculty, rebirth takes place as follows:

- Faculty of faith - ***Aviha***, the durable heaven
- Faculty of effort- ***Atappa***, the serene heaven
- Faculty of mindfulness - ***Sudassa***, the beautiful heaven
- Faculty of concentration - ***Sudassi***, the clear-sighted heaven
- Faculty of Wisdom - ***Akanittha***, the supreme heaven.

C) The Four Formless Realms (*Arupa Brahma*)

Beings, who, practise tranquility meditation by passing beyond all form perceptions and attain ***Arupa Jhana*** or Formless States of Absorption are reborn in the formless realms possessing mind only and no material quality at all. The four formless realms, according to their *Arupa Jhanas* are:

- *Akasananca-bhumi* – Realm of Infinite Space
- *Vinnanancayatana-bhumi* -- Realm of Infinite Consciousness
- *Akincannayatana-bhumi* – Realm of Nothingness
- *N'evanna-nasannayatana-bhumi* – Realm of Neither-Perception nor Non-Perception

<u>How do we get the 31 states of existence?</u>

If the *asuras* are considered as a separate state of existence, there are now 4 woeful states (hell, animal, ghost, *asura*), 7 happy sensuous states (human and 6 *deva* states), 16 form states (Form *brahmas*) and 4 formless states (Formless *brahmas*). Total = 31 states of existence.

6. Lifespan of Hell Beings and *Petas*

a) Hell beings, animals and *petas* do not have fixed lifespan. Their lifespan varies according to their individual *kamma*. Some are short-lived like the case of the monk Tissa who was reborn as a flea on his new robe and expired after seven days or the case of Queen Mallika who had to suffer seven days in hell due to an immoral deed but was reborn again as a celestial *deva* on account of her good *kamma*. On the other hand, Devadatta had to suffer in Avici hell for an aeon for his weighty bad *kamma* of causing a schism in the *Sangha*.

b) Human beings also do not have fixed lifespan. The age-limit rises from ten years to an exceedingly great age and then falls back to ten years again. According to the Chronicle of Buddhas (*Buddhavamsa*), the lifespan of humans in the present world cycle was 40,000 years at the time of Kakusandha Buddha, 30,000 years at the time of Konagamana Buddha, 20,000 years at the time of Kassapa Buddha and 80-100 years at the time of Gotama Buddha. Although the earth-bound deities and degraded *asuras* both belong to the *Catumaharajika* plane, they too do not have fixed lifespan.

c) *Devas* & *Brahmas* in celestial planes have fixed lifespan.

7. Lifespan of Celestial *Devas*

Deva **Plane**	**Lifespan** ***deva*****-years**	**Human years per** ***deva*****-day**	**Lifespan human yrs**
Catumaharajika	500	50	9 million
Tavatimsa	1000	100	36 million
Yama	2000	200	144 million
Tusita	4000	400	576 million
Nimmarati	8000	800	2314 million
Paranimmita vasavati	16000	1600	9216 million

How to calculate the lifespan of *devas* in terms of human years

30 celestial days make a celestial month and 12 celestial months make a celestial year. A celestial day in *Catumaharajika* is equivalent to 50 years on earth. So one year in *Catumaharajika* is equivalent to 360 x 50 = 18000 years on earth. Multiply this by 500 *deva*-years gives *Catumaharajika* lifespan of 9 million human years. For each higher plane, the lifespan is doubled and the duration of a celestial day is also doubled. In terms of human years, *deva* lifespan increases 4 times for each higher plane.

How long did the Buddha preached to His mother in heaven?

According to the Texts, Lord Buddha preached the Higher Philosophy (*Abhidhamma*) to His mother in *Tavatimsa* heaven continuously for three months without stopping. No human being would be able to listen to the whole sermon without a break. But as 100 years on earth is just 1 day in *Tavatimsa*, 3 months on earth is only **3.6 minutes** in *Tavatimsa*! To the gods, it would be a short discourse. They would have no difficulty listening attentively to it.

8. Lifespan of *Brahmas*

***Brahma* Plane**	**Name of Plane**	**Lifespan**
First *Jhana*	Brahma's retinue	1/3 incalculable epoch
(3 form planes)	Brahma's ministers	1/2 incalculable epoch
	Great Brahma	1 incalculable epoch
Second *Jhana*	Minor Lustre	2 world cycles
(3 form planes)	Infinite Lustre	4 world cycles
	Radiant Lustre	8 world cycles
Third *Jhana*	Minor Aura	16 world cycles
(3 form planes)	Infinite Aura	32 world cycles
	Steady Aura	64 world cycles

Fourth *Jhana*	Great Reward	500 world cycles
(7 form planes)	*Unconscious Beings	500 world cycles
	(**Asanna-satta* in Explanatory Notes)	
	Five Pure Abodes, namely:	
	Durable realm	1000 world cycles
	Serene realm	2000 world cycles
	Beautiful realm	4000 world cycles
	Clear-sighted realm	8000 world cycles
	Highest realm	16000 world cycles
Arupa Jhana	Infinite Space	20000 world cycles
(4 formless planes)	Infinite Consciousness	40000 world cycles
	Nothingness	60000 world cycles
	Neither Perception nor Non-perception	84000 world cycles

For a description of the various time-periods given above, namely, incalculable epoch (*asankheyya*-kappa) and world cycle (*maha-kappa*), please refer to Chapter VIII on Buddhist Timescale.

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10. Explanatory Notes

Asanna-satta (Non-Percipient or Unconscious Beings)

The *Asanna-sattas* are the inhabitants of the eleventh *Brahmaloka* who pass their existence in a state of total unconsciousness. They possess only '*rupa*' or material qualities and are without any '*nama*' or mental qualities. In the Buddhist Philosophy of Relations (Manuals of Buddhism), the Venerable Mahathera Ledi Sayadaw explains that for such beings, the preceding consciousness is that of the decease (*cuti-citta* or the dying-thought) from the previous life in the *kamaloka* (sensuous plane) and the succeeding thought is that of the rebirth (*patisandhi*) in the following life in the *kamaloka*. Between these two classes of consciousness, the **total suspension of thought** of the unconscious being occurs for the whole term of life amounting to **500 *kappas***.

According the seventh and last treatise of the *Abhidhamma Pita*ka called the ***Patthana* (Conditional Relations)**, in every process of thought, each preceding mental state relates to the succeeding mental state by causing the succeeding mental state to arise immediately after its ceasing, in accordance with the fixed order of mental process by the **Relation of Immediate Contiguity**. In the case of the unconscious being, the faculty of the preceding consciousness in causing a succeeding consciousness to arise in an immediate following instant has only been delayed for 500 *kappas* through certain highly cultivated contemplations and resolutions.

As an illustration, only the Buddha and certain *Arahants* and *Anagamins* who have mastered all the eight absorptions (*jhanas*) are able to develop the ***Nirodha-samapatti–vithi*** or '**attainment of cessation**' whereby all consciousness and mental activity are temporarily suspended. The person will remain in this state of cessation of consciousness, mental concomitants and mind-produced material qualities till the end of the period he has resolved to remain in this state. Though he does not breathe, eat, drink or know anything, he is still alive. At the time of 'sustained cessation' (*nirodha-samapatti*), the preceding consciousness is that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (the eighth *jhana* or fourth *arupa jhana*), and the succeeding consciousness is that of the *Ariyan* fruition i.e. *Arahatta* or *Anagami* fruition consciousness (depending on the stage of sainthood of the person). Between these two classes of consciousness, the total suspension of thought occurs for one day, or for two, or three…or even for seven days.